

**Public Comments Regarding  
Wild and Scenic Suitability  
San Miguel/Dolores Rivers**

**November 29, 30 and December 1, 2010**

*A series of initial public meetings were hosted by the BLM's Sub-RAC in Norwood, Naturita and Telluride, CO in late Fall 2010. The two-hour evening gatherings opened with a presentation by Roy Smith of the BLM, outlining the Wild And Scenic Act and various activities it requires. Following the presentation, those in attendance were encouraged to participate in a question-and-answer session with the presenter, and then to provide general comments regarding the process and likely impacts of any suitability findings and subsequent action on the San Miguel and Dolores river segments and tributaries under consideration.*

*The following provides a summary of the comments made at each meeting.*

Norwood, CO; November 29, 2010. Approximately 40 people in attendance

- Increasing regulations restrict rights and add to the complexity of agricultural production. This will hinder ag producers' ability to make a living.
- There will be increased pressure on domestic use of water if there is a federal water right attached to WSR designation. There will be a battle down the road over in-stream flow and federal water right.
- I would like to see the BLM actively manage the lands/waters, or Congress and special interests will.
- BLM already has the ability to manage this land without another designation.
- "What ORV is being damaged that WSR will fix?"
- What are the benefits to changing the current situation? (implied: there are none)
- Agriculture has been taking care of this land for many years, and that is the reason that it looks like it does. (implied: land is well cared for under current "system")
- We see ourselves as the stewards of the land.
- WSR designation will only increase traffic on the river.
- BLM is shutting off land uses and this is one more tool to do that. WSR adds another layer of bureaucracy.
- I see the Act as discriminatory in-and-of itself; leads to limited access.
- I see this as shutting us off from natural resources. This is of concern, as it impacts our ability to do business.
- No one wants their rights taken away as a result of WSR eligibility, suitability or designation.
- I think the BLM should "force" Congress to do something regarding designation once suitability has been determined.
- If it won't be acted upon, don't do it.
- Placer miners invite and encourage others' involvement on the rivers.
- I assume that the BLM hears more from recreational/environmental interests than those who make a living on/around the rivers.

Procedural:

- If a stream is determined to be eligible, does that status ever go away or does it “sit there” similar to a Wilderness Study Area?
- WSR Act Sections 6 and 7 need to be further explained so that all landowners understand what is in the Act and its implications. Reading the Act is very confusing, and it is important to know the impacts on private landowners if WSR designation is in place.
- We need further information on the unintended consequences of WSR designation. There is concern over the ability of a court to overturn water rights’ jurisdiction.
- There is a vicious circle that occurs between the BLM and Congress. The BLM says, “We don’t have any control over X, you’ll need to talk with Congress.” Then, when we try to contact Congress, they send us back to the BLM.
- This process is helpful in bringing people together for shared solutions.

Naturita, CO; November 30, 2010. Approximately 50 people in attendance

- There’s not a lot of trust in the feds, and I don’t feel that they really listen to the people.
- There is no/little value added by BLM management; the agency doesn’t have the expertise to manage the rivers.
- This is expensive and taxpayer funded; I don’t like it.
- Fish have flourished for a very long time without any protection.
- There were no negative impacts from the Union Carbide operation that was here.
- I feel that WSR is a taking of our private property rights. Recreational designation makes no sense (there may not be access to the river, anyway). Many segments being considered are privately owned, anyway. (response: specific information regarding private ownership is exactly the type of information we need during this process)
- Don’t want to be hamstrung by WSR suitability or designation.
- As a private land owner, I have a significant negative response to all of this.
- The fact that Hwy 141 runs right along the river should impact your decisions.
- If this river is WSR, what will happen to the gold panners who come to this town? They represent good money to this community.
- Placer mining is important to this region.
- I’m worried about water availability in our community. We need a reservoir, and I think WSR could negatively impact this.
- I see the potential future need for a hydro-electric plant in the area.

Procedural:

- I have concerns over how nonprofit-owned lands are managed/impacted by BLM management. (response: in the same way as any other privately-owned property)
- What costs are associated with each segment that has to be managed? (response: this varies)
- Why wasn’t private ownership considered during the eligibility process? (response: BLM always considers private ownership during the suitability phase of the process)
- It seems like the ORVs are too broad, that everything qualifies. (response: we’re looking for the “best of the best”)

- What is the best way to be heard and give information on specific river segments? (response: come to these meetings and speak, submit comments in writing, talk with Sub-RAC members)

Telluride, CO; December 1, 2010. Approximately 30 people in attendance

- It is important to work with the natural cycles (e.g. fire, flood) on the San Miguel River. This has helped with tamarisk abatement efforts.
- We can capitalize on the beauty and economic impacts of these rivers. I'd like to see designation move forward.
- The issue of dust is important to look at in the suitability process.
- People's emotional/passionate responses are a valid consideration, as they represent the cultural reality of the community.
- I see WSR as adding more "bureaucratic layers."
- I appreciate the BLM process. We (Trout Unlimited) are interested in cold water processes. We like to see leakages reduced, etc., and encourage you to look at ditches.
- "IF" designation occurs is a really big "if." Designation is a very difficult process that isn't finalized very often.
- We can no longer look at the earth as here to serve people. Rather, people need to protect the earth for the future. I encourage the BLM to "do the right thing." (implied: move forward with WSR suitability/designation)

Procedural:

- I'd like to see a collaboration between/among Colorado and Utah offices of the BLM that work within the Colorado River watershed.
- What if the river is over-appropriated? (response: water courts handle this)
- How does over-appropriation affect well water sources? (response: since BLM has junior water rights, there usually is no impact)
- How does the Sub-RAC deal with comments from the public that may or may not be factual in nature? (response: the suitability process, including public input, is designed to move from the emotional to the informed; we are seeking good information that provides insight)
- Does WSR provide better protections than existing systems/tools? (response: varies; there are many systems/tools that are at work via governmental/private efforts)
- When do federal water rights begin? (response: on the date of WSR designation)
- When suitability is found, does the BLM later qualify this? (response: this is unlikely unless something significant has changed)
- Can suitability help "both arms" of local river interests be met? (response: potentially yes; there are no pre-conceived thoughts on the part of the BLM in this regard)